

LESSONS PAUL LEARNED IN PRISON
Phil. 1:12-26

Intro: We have been considering the book of Philippians to discover, if we can, the reason that Paul's life as a child of God was so full of joy. It is quite an amazing fact that this letter which is so full of the joy of the Lord was written during Paul's confinement as a prisoner of Rome. So it is apparent that he had to look beyond his circumstances.

His experiences called for an explanation. He wanted to
We might very truthfully say that the great lesson which was
most obvious to Paul during these days was that God is abso-
lutely sovereign in the lives of His children. This is to
be seen in his statement in ch. 1, v. 12.

But let us look a little deeper.

Let us ask ourselves this question: In what specific ways was the sovereignty of God displayed to Paul during his days of imprisonment? What did Paul learn from God about the things which God was seeking to accomplish in these strange ways?

It was probably some five years earlier that Paul had written to the Roman church and had stated to them, "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Cf. Rom. 11:33b.

And surely Paul must have been acquainted with these words from Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9).

And Solomon is responsible for these words: "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright" (Prov. 10:29a).

So God has strange ways and strange places and strange instruments for teaching us what He wants us to know

As we look at Paul's words, what lessons did he learn?

I. HE LEARNED (perhaps we should say, learned again) HOW GREATLY GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT MEN WHO DO NOT KNOW THE SAVIOUR.

We see this in vv. 12, 13. "Palace" would be better translated, "'throughout the praetorian guard,' i.e. the Soldiers composing the imperial regiments" (Lightfoot, p. 88). In other words, the expression emphasizes the men

WHY?
MOSES -
EX. 5:22
23
JOSHUA
IN 7:1
DISCIPLES
MT. 17:19
PETER
JN. 13:37
JUDAS
JN. 12:5

6:13

who heard the Gospel, not the place where they lived. These were the royal palace guard, the choicest men of of Roman army, and it had been set up by the Emperor Tiberius himself.

Lightfoot translates this: "My bonds have borne witness to Christ, not only among the soldiers of the imperial guard, but in a far wider circle" (p. 87).

Paul had spoken to the guards, and from there it had spread out in an unbelievable way. Cf. Phil. 4:22.

So the enemies of Christ thought that they were silencing the Apostle; instead, under the blessing of God, the most influential door ever had been opened.

But let us look a little more closely.

When the door was opened to Paul, what did he give these soldiers?

Note: v. 12, "the gospel." → *6x in ch. 1 - vv. 5, 7, 12, 17, 27(24)*
 v. 14, "the word." → *3x in rest of book 2:22; 4:2, 15*
 vv. 15, 16, 18, "Preach Christ."

To Paul, the only way you could preach the Gospel, or preach the Word, was by preaching Christ.

Paul did not preach the Gospel because of what these soldiers might do for him (i.e., get him out of prison), BUT HE PREACHED THE GOSPEL BECAUSE OF WHAT CHRIST COULD DO FOR THEM! Cf. 2Cor. 4:5.

Nothing delights the heart of God ~~more~~ ^{more} than for us to proclaim the glories of His Son. All of Rome seems to have broken out with this message.

God had set before Paul an open door behind closed doors.

And do not say that These brethren who were also preaching were preaching a corrupt Gospel. Paul never rejoiced in a perverted Gospel. Cf. Gal. 1:8, 9. Some of them had the wrong motive, but their message was alright--and Paul rejoiced that they were preaching Christ.

And so Paul was learning that the winning of men to Christ was always upon God's heart, and always behind His actions.

But there is a second lesson to notice in this passage.

II. PAUL WAS LEARNING THAT GOD HAD SOMETHING IN THIS EXPERIENCE FOR HIM.

Paul had been led to think of his "~~salvation~~" (v. 19).

Paul had been led to examine his own objectives in life.
We spoke of these last week.

He had been led to think about death.

His thoughts had been turned toward heaven.

How long has it been since you have thought of these things?

Not compared with prison, but with life in Christ.
When Paul says that "to depart, and to be with Christ . . . is far better," he literally is saying, not just that it is better, nor much better, but very much better. It is a triple comparative.

Here in his confinement Paul was thinking, not just about his ministry to others, but about God's ministry to him. This is a work which never stops. God never loses sight of it. It is always in his thoughts. It should always be in ours.

David shared this same vision of things with Paul. In Psalm 138 he wrote, "Though I ~~walk~~ in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Psa. 138:7, 8a).

But there is one other lesson Paul was learning here, or learning in a deeper way.

III. PAUL WAS LEARNING HOW GREATLY CONCERNED GOD IS ABOUT THE MINISTRY TO HIS PEOPLE.

There had been times during Paul's confinement when he thought that his ministry was over--that he would never be released alive.

But in some way (we do not know how) God had shown him that his ministry was not over.

Furthermore, he had been shown that he ~~was~~ being spared primarily for one thing: He was needed for a ministry to the people of God.

Read vv. 23-26.

Have you noticed how the Church is in danger of losing

sight of this ministry? We often preach to people who are not there, and ignore the people who are!

If the saints are not growing then there will be very little ministry to people who need the Saviour. And often our attempts to reach the unsaved are not in accordance with the Word of God and so we do more harm than good.

Nothing in the ministry of the Word is more vital than God's ministry to His people--and the Lord allowed Paul to be imprisoned to deepen his understanding of this truth.

But what specifically did Paul intend to do? Read again vv. 25, 26.

Both "furtherance" and "joy" go with "faith."

What is meant by "furtherance"? It is the same word used with "the gospel" in v. 12. Moule uses the word progress. Literally it is to clear the way forward.

Paul's experiences in prison had been used to clear the way forward for the Gospel. When he got out of prison he was to clear the way forward in the life of believing God/for the people of God. HIS PRISON EXPERIENCE WAS PREP. FOR FUTURE MIN.

How would he do this? By ministering to them out of the Word of God supported by his own experience of trusting the Lord.

Note how he prays for them in vv. 9-11. Does this mean that their faith was in need since this is the first mention of faith in the book? (He does not write to them as he does to the Colossians in Col. 1:4.)

This is the life that produces joy. A growing ~~faith~~ faith is a joyful faith. "The more faith the more joy" (M. Henry, VI, 730).

And this in turn produces fellowship (v. 26)--another source of joy in the life of the believer.

Concl: Tremendous lessons! There are undoubtedly more than I have mentioned. But these are basic, and all are related to the joy which Paul knew ~~his~~ in his own life, and to the joy which he wanted the Philippians to share with him.

Prayer 114. O for a faith that will not shrink